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U.S. NEWS

Health Department intends to revoke license from Mississippi's only abortion clinic

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Abortion advocates placed signs on the front security gating of the Jackson Women's Health Organization. Activists pro-and anti-abortion marked 40 years since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling established a nationwide right to abortion, with protests at the Capitol and at the clinic. (Rogelio V. Solis/AP)

JACKSON, Miss. -- Mississippi's only abortion clinic said it received notice Friday that the state Health Department intends to revoke its operating license.

However, the clinic, Jackson Women's Health Organization, is not expected to close anytime soon.

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Under a state administrative procedures law, the clinic can remain open while it awaits a hearing by the department. That could be more than a month away.

Clinic owner Diane Derzis said this week that she expected the notice about a possible license revocation.

Health Department workers inspected the facility Jan. 16 to see if it had complied with a 2012 state law that requires anyone doing abortions at the clinic to be an OB-GYN with hospital admitting privileges.

Derzis said local hospitals would not issue privileges to out-of-state physicians who do most of the abortions at the clinic.

Admitting privileges can be difficult to obtain. Some hospitals won't issue them to out-of-state physicians, while hospitals that are affiliated with religious groups might not want to associate with anyone who does elective abortions.

"They were clear that they didn't deal with abortion and they didn't want the internal

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Republican Gov. Phil Bryant, who signed the 2012 law, has said repeatedly that he wants Mississippi to be abortion-free and that he'd shut the clinic if he had the power to do it.

Supporters of the law say it's intended to protect women's safety. Opponents say admitting privileges are unnecessary because the clinic has an agreement to transfer patients to a local hospital if an emergency arises; the patients would be tended by physicians on duty at the hospital.

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The clinic filed a federal lawsuit last summer as the law was about to take effect, arguing that the law is unconstitutional because it would effectively block women's access to abortion in Mississippi by closing the facility where most of the 2,000-plus abortions a year are performed in the state. A 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe vs. Wade* established the nationwide right to abortion.

U.S. District Judge Daniel P. Jordan III gave the facility time to try to comply with the law, blocking any criminal or civil penalties during that period. Clinic attorneys are asking Jordan to extend his injunction on the law.

The clinic filed a plan with the state Health Department showing that it intended to

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The Health Department wrote a letter Thursday that was delivered to the clinic Friday, showing the findings of the inspection. The department noted that none of the three physicians affiliated with the clinic have local hospital admitting privileges. It said one of the physicians previously had the privileges, but those had expired July 27.

The department also noted that the clinic had too few parking spaces available. State regulations require the clinic to be "located in an attractive setting with sufficient parking space provided." The department told the clinic to submit a plan within 10 days showing how it would correct the parking situation. The clinic's parking lot holds fewer than 20 cars.

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